

...that April 8 is Yom Ha Shoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, but acts of anti-Semitism still occur in Europe?

In Russia, xenophobia and intolerance, including anti-Semitism, fuel hate crimes by skinhead groups. In Belarus, the anti-Jewish utterances of President Lukashenko and the state media are coupled by a failure to identify or punish the vandals of Jewish cemeteries and other property. Echoing Hungary's Nazi era, the leader of its third largest party recently urged the government to create a list of Jews posing "a national security threat." Fortunately, Hungary's government, including its Parliament, condemned this statement.

Elsewhere in Europe, since 2000, anti-Jewish graffiti increasingly has appeared in Paris and Berlin, Madrid and Amsterdam, London and Rome, and synagogues have been vandalized or set ablaze in France, Greece, and Sweden. In France, "unprecedented violence" took place last year, according to a recent report issued by the security unit of France's Jewish community. There were 614 anti-Semitic incidents in 2012, compared to 389 in 2011. Earlier this February, a woman was arrested in Toulouse, France after trying to stab a student at the Ohr HaTorah Jewish day school where four Jews were shot and killed in March 2012. In Greece, synagogues and Jewish cemeteries have been desecrated, and the rise of the Golden Dawn political party is deeply troubling. In Malmo, Sweden, physical attacks have fueled a Jewish exodus.

Perpetrators range from neo-Nazis or members of skinhead groups to those distorting the religion of Islam to advance their own intolerant agendas.

Four factors compound the problem. First, European officials remain reluctant to identify the perpetrators' ideological or religious motivations. Second, surveys show that negative attitudes towards Jews remain widespread among Europe's population. Third, these surveys confirm that some of this bias reveals itself through certain criticisms of the state of Israel. While no country is beyond reproach, when criticism includes language intended to delegitimize Israel, demonize its people, and apply to it standards to which no other state is held, it becomes anti-Semitic. Finally, a number of European governments and political parties have supported restrictions on vital religious practices. At least four countries – Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland – ban kosher slaughter. Authorities and political forces in Norway and Germany also have tried to ban infant male circumcision.